Montana's Distance Learning Policy for Adult Basic and Literacy Education

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Table of Contents

Montana's Distance Learning Assessment Policy

This policy is intended to define distance learning delivery for all Montana ABLE programs that integrate distance learning into their Adult Basic and Literacy Programs.

This document is based on the National Reporting System (NRS) distance learning guidelines and the incorporation of ideas and procedures developed by the 2007-2008 distance learning pilot teams: Miles City, Lewistown/Roundup, and Crow Agency/Hardin.

Setting the Context for Distance Learning

THE NEED

Montana welcomes distance learning as a means to improve the state's Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) outcomes. Seventeen percent of the adult population (16 years and older) are in need of a high school education and/or skills to function in the workplace. The vastness of Montana often prevents those most in need of literacy services from accessing ABLE programs. Of the 56 counties in the state, 20 offer ABLE services, leaving 36 counties with no ABLE services. Distance education provides a viable option for instruction and a way to recruit a large population of students that previously may not have had access to ABLE services.

Through the implementation of distance learning, ABLE programs will be able to reach the under-skilled employed and unemployed by offering flexible hours and instruction through various types of media. Through the variety of instructional strategies available through distance learning, instructors will be able to engage students previously not attracted to the traditional classroom delivery. Students enrolled in distance education now have the same opportunity as the traditional students to receive quality instruction taught by trained, knowledgeable instructors as students as the traditional student. The greatest attraction to distance learning is the ability of instructors to design delivery around student schedules and life circumstances, enhancing engagement and retention.

PILOT PROJECT

Montana ABLE piloted distance learning in five learning programs spanning several counties which included the largest Indian Reservation in the state. Distance learning was introduced to students during the second semester of 2007-2008 program year in order to develop protocol and instructional methodologies prior to implementing distance learning statewide. The pilot project focused on recruitment through employer contact, student persistence, best practices for distance delivery, and analysis of pilot data to create state policy.

PILOT PROJECT DATA FROM JANUARY 2008 TO MAY 2008

Pilot data has validated that distance learners can succeed in Montana.
1. ABLE programs created stronger community agency liaisons. Employer support included some of the following incentives:
- increased salaries based on educational attainment
- paid for GED testing
- provided designated computer areas at worksites
2. ABLE enrollment numbers have increased 20 – 50 % among the 5 pilot sites
3. GED's have been obtained
- Five students have successfully completed GED through distance learning
4. On the average distance learners log 8.5 contact hours/week.
5. On the average distance learners are enrolled for 2 -3 months.
6. On the average distance learners made a 20% educational gain after post testing

As with traditional classroom instructional delivery, student retention and persistence are issues that remain a challenge for the distance educator.

GOING TO SCALE

Programs that wish to offer distance learning will have the opportunity to contact the state ABLE director, participate in all statewide required trainings, use state approved curriculum, and manage distance learning according to state policy and NRS guidelines. Distance learning will be a voluntary delivery option, as ABLE programs must be willing to incur increased costs as well as maintain traditional classroom instruction.

Information and technical assistance for local program distance learning implementation is available by contacting the state office or the state's distance learning coordinator.

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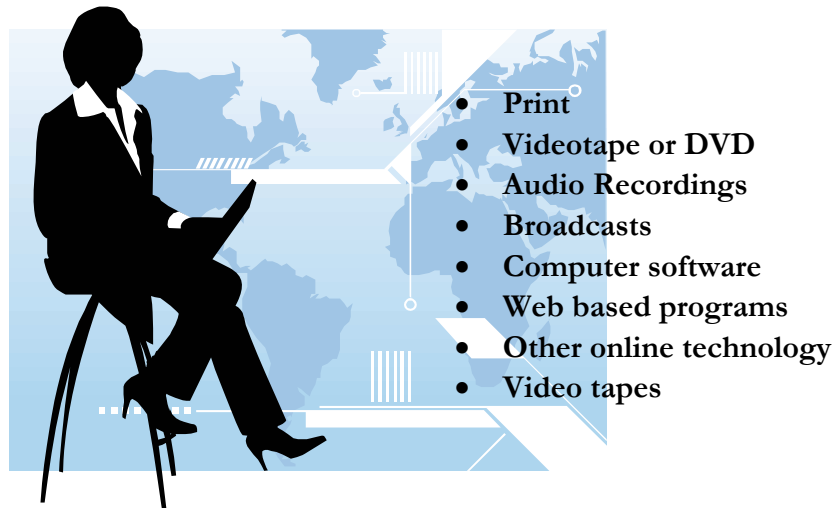
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General Distance Learning Requirements

DEFINITION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education is a formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both, for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media including, but not limited to:

- **Print**
- **Videotape or DVD**
- **Audio Recordings**
- **Broadcasts**
- **Computer software**
- **Web based programs**
- **Other online technology**
- **Video tapes**

Teachers support distance learners through communication via mail, telephone, e-mail or online technologies and software.

DEFINITION OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

Distance learners are students who receive distance education services as defined above. However, it is not uncommon for adult learners to receive both distance education and traditional classroom education during the course of the program year. Students who receive a blended approach of instruction can only be classified in one or the other at year's end.

Instructors will keep track of student time in the Montana Student Information System (MABLE). Attendance hours will be entered in MABLE in distance learning classes and the traditional classroom setting. As students complete their study, the data system will classify students as either distance learners or traditional learners, depending on where the majority of the student time was spent (51% or greater).

APPROVED CURRICULA

Montana recognizes GED Online, GED Connections and SkillsTutor as distance learning curricula. As instructors become more experienced and skilled at delivering distance education, Montana will draw from multiple sources to best support instructors and the needs of their students.

Montana Recognizes the following Curricula:
GED Connections, PLATO, NovaNet,
Missouri GED Online and
Skills Tutor

The state will approve additional curricula based on investigation and data analysis. Programs wishing to develop distance learning courses may submit a request to the state agency specifying who is able to develop and teach these courses and provide investigation into how these courses can be approved by the state. This might include information about the training needed for teachers to develop and offer courses, how proxy contact hours will be determined, and what instructional strategies will be utilized.

REQUIREMENTS FOR MEASURING CONTACT HOURS

Students in distance education must have at least 12 hours of contact with an ABLE program before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Contact hours can be a combination of direct contact and distance activities. Distance learning instruction may include a wider range of activities accepted for traditional classroom, which may include:

- Face-to-face contact: orientation, intake, pre-testing, posttesting, goal setting, career counseling
- Live online discussions
- Telephone conversations
- Live video broadcast to remote location

Direct contact hours must involve interaction between the learner and the staff in real time where the identity of the learner can be verified.

PROXY CONTACT HOURS

Proxy contact hours must be associated with one of three approved distance learning models of instruction:

> **Clock Time Model** – Assigns contact hours based on time that a learner is engaged in a software program that tracks time.
> **Teacher Judgment Model** – Assigns a fixed number of hours based on teacher determination of the extent to which a learner engaged in, or completed, the assignment.
> **Learner Mastery Model** – Assigns a fixed number of hours based on the learner passing a test on the content of the lesson.

The model used in Montana ABLE programs will vary depending upon the approved curricula. The Web based program, Missouri GED Online, uses the **Learner Mastery Model** to assign proxy hours. In this model, when students demonstrate on a quiz that they have mastered the instructional content at 75 percent they are assigned proxy hours. Students are allowed to retake a quiz after supplemental and/or in class instruction has taken place. After the second attempt diagnostic intervention must take place. After the third unsuccessful attempt students must be redirected. No more that 3 quizzes of the same content are counted. Quizzes one through three may be entered into the MABLE student information system. In the case of Missouri GED Online, the actual assignment of proxy contact hours varies by instructional unit (see chart below).

While using proxy hours, it is important to understand that the identity of the learner and the exact time spent on a learning activity cannot always be verified directly. Proxy hours are an approximation of what the "average" student needs to reach a mastery level. Montana utilizes the proxy hours determined by Missouri GED Online calculated in the section below.

Time Approved for Each GED Online Assignment

LA, Reading &Writing Units		Social Studies Units	
Interpreting What You Read	1.34	Social Studies Assessment	1.25
Interpreting Info from Graphs	.97	U.S. History	1.25
Punctuation	1.42	Geography	1.0
Capitalization	.89	Political Cartoons	1.25
Pronouns	1.00	Additional Work 1 Hour	1.0
Modifiers	1.5	Additional Work 1.5 Hours	1.5
Verbs	1.5	Additional Work 2.0 Hours	2.0
Subject – Verb Agreement	1.75		
Poetry	1.36	**Science Units**	
Sentence Structure	1.0	Science Assessment	1.25
Writing Clear Sentences	1.0	Special Topics	1.71
Paragraph Organization	1.5	Earth Science	.75
Writing an Essay	1.5	Life Science	1.03
		Chemistry	2.92

Math Units

Whole Number Word Problems	.82	Ratio and Proportions	1.5
Intro to Decimals	2.17	Percents	1.98
Decimals	1.98	Percent Word Problems	1.2
Decimal Word Problems	1.23	Integers	1.14
Intro to Fractions	2.11	Integer Word Problems	.8
Adding and Subtracting Fractions	1.08	Pre-Algebra	3.0
Multiplying and Dividing Fractions	1.44	Algebraic Equations	2.37
Fraction Word Problems	1.18	Algebra Word Problems	2.8
Estimating and Rounding	2.02	Geometry I	2.15
		Geometry II	2.09

Proxy Contact Hours Continued…

The Web based program, SkillsTutor, uses the **Clock Time Model** to assign proxy hours. When students log into SkillsTutor with their assigned passwords, the software program tracks their time until they log out of the program completely. The time allotted for each assignment will vary with every student.

REPORTING PROXY HOURS

Montana ABLE has incorporated Missouri GED proxy hour units, as listed above, into MABLE. Instructors enter units completed, attendance hours, and pretest and posttest results into MABLE for managing and monitoring student learning.

MABLE contains a class set up titled, "SkillsTutor," which requires instructors to enter the time tracked by the software for each unit the student completes.

All distance learner data will be reported on TABLE 4C (see Appendix A).

DISTANCE LEARNING-STUDENT TRACKER TIME SHEET

State ABLE programs that implement distance learning will have the option of using a student tracker timesheet to assist with data collection. Students can be taught how to use the timesheet to record :

- Hours studied
- Web sites used
- Subject studied
- E-mailed instructor

The student tracking sheet is a time management tool for students, the hours on this sheet are not the hours entered into MABLE. The data collected from this tool can be used to analyze distance learning and help instructor's monitor student progress and plan for future success.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

TABE Administration
On-site assessment administration for the TABE pretest and posttest is required. Student contact hours will be tracked in the MABLE data system. Upon completion of 60 hours of instruction, instructors will be automatically advised that it is time to administer a posttest.

- Intake, goal setting, and pretest and posttesting must be administered on-site at the Montana ABLE centers.

- The TABE assessment tool will be administered in person by a certified TABE instructor.

Instructional Time
Instructors will count both direct contact hours and proxy hours and report these hours into MABLE to calculate instructional time.

Note

Traditional class hours and proxy hours are recorded separately. At the end of each program year, MABLE will classify students as either distance learners or as traditional learners, depending on where the majority of their time has been spent.

Application and Approval Procedures to Operate a Distance Learning Program

Montana will allow ABLE programs the option of implementing a distance learning program at their centers in addition to maintaining the traditional classroom setting. Each ABLE program interested in offering a distance learning program will follow these procedures:

- Send the Program Director, and any staff members directly involved, to a distance learning professional development training offered by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI.).

- Select one individual to become the lead distance learning instructor for the center. This individual must be able to perform a variety of duties, as described in the ABLE Distance Learning Protocol Guide.

- Complete the activities, as a team (program director, lead instructor and other identified distance learning staff), in order to understand the process of distance learning.

- Coordinate marketing efforts to recruit additional partner agencies/employer partners and potential distance learning students.

- Attend and contribute in a monthly distance learning conference call organized by the state agency (program director, lead instructor and identified staff representative).

- Maintain communication with state staff via e-mail or telephone if challenges arise with distance learning software.

    o On the first Monday of each month send an e-mail to cflynn@mt.gov with the following information: names of students that need to be deleted from GED online, and names of students that your programs has deleted from SkillsTutor.

- Develop a yearly distance learning continuous improvement plan including:

    o Analysis of employer's needs;
    o An assessment of students' successes; and
    o A goal to increase the number of distance learners served with an accompanying marketing plan.

*Note: The Montana pilot project was based on bridging the gap between local employers and Montana ABLE programs. Ideally, all programs will continue to use this format as a means of recruiting distance learning students, as described in the ABLE Distance Learning Protocol Guide).

Funding for Distance Learning

State Contribution

No additional funding will be provided. A reallocation of existing resources may be necessary. Programs that implement distance learning have the potential to increase their total students served and receive additional state monies for numbers served. Programs may receive reimbursements to cover the cost of travel to the required distance learning training sessions.

Program Contribution

Programs that wish to implement distance learning must adhere to the Montana Distance Learning Assessment Policy and Protocol Guidelines. Programs may need to fund additional time and resources to distance education. It is also imperative to budget for increased marketing costs during the first year of implementation.

Training Requirements

ABLE programs interested in providing distance education must complete the required state training program. Montana will use the DL 101 course from Project Ideal, which includes a one day face-to-face training followed by 4-8 weeks of transition and program development. Program director and staff will participate in monthly conference calls offered by the state to explore the issues related to distance learning. Program director and staff will also be expected to participate in all state required trainings as additional online resources and curricula are added to the state's distance delivery system.

Appendices

1. Table 4C- Educational Gains & Attendance for Participants in Distance Education

Table 4C
Educational Gains and Attendance for Participants in Distance Education

Enter number of distance education participants for each category listed, calculate percentage of participants completing each level, and enter total proxy and direct attendance hours.

Entering Educational Functioning Level (A)	Total Number Enrolled In Distance Education (B)	Total Estimated and Actual Attendance Hours (C)	Number Completed Level (D)	Number who Completed a Level and Advanced One or More Levels (E)	Number Separated Before Completed (F)	Number Remaining Within Level (G)	Percentage Completing Level (H)
ABE Beginning							
ABE Beginning							
ABE							
ABE							
ASE Low							
ASE High*							
ESL Beginning							
ESL Low							
ESL High							
ESL							
ESL							
ESL Advanced							
Total							

Include in this table only students who are counted as distance education students.

Column *D* is the total number of learners who completed a level, including learners who left after completing and learners who remained enrolled and moved to one or more higher levels.
Column *E* represents a subset of Column *D* (Number Completed Level) and is learners who completed a level and enrolled in one or more higher levels.
Column *F* is students who left the program or received no services for 90 consecutive days and have no scheduled services.
Column *D + F + G* should equal the total in Column *B*.
Column *G* represents the number of learners still enrolled who are at the same educational level as when they entered.

Each row total in Column *H* is calculated using the following formula: $H = \frac{ColumnD}{ColumnB}$

Work-based project learners are not included in this table
.*Completion of ASE high level is attainment of a secondary credential or passing GED tests.   OMB Number xxxx-xxxx, Expires xx/xx/xx